

Stories of Resurrection: Traces of God in New Community

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The United States has been one of the most religiously observant countries in the contemporary world, but of the seventy million people born between 1946 and 1964 almost fifty million left the church, rejecting not God, but rather "lifeless religion and "stale churches."¹ With two to three generations of unchurched people in America, the United States along with most of the Western world has re-entered a rank once typically reserved for Third World countries, that of "mission." Exploring new ways to speak of God in a post-Christian world is imperative.

Robert D. Putnam reports in his best-selling work *Bowling Alone* that in America between 1986 and 1998, while museum attendance was up ten percent and movie-going was up by twenty-five percent, church attendance in the United States was down ten percent.² Contemporary urbanites hungering for an inchoate spiritual experience stand in line for hours waiting to see the latest Picasso or Matisse exhibit, or one of the film installments in the Tolkien trilogy, but such spiritual seekers scarcely consider the church as an option in their quest. Why museums or films but not the church?

Cultural studies and everyday experience show that as we oscillate between late- and post-modernity we are moving into a post-literate age, with thought forms shifting from linear to non-linear as intuition and imagination counter rational discovery made solely through scientific method. Beginning roughly with people born in the late 1940s, and continuing in every subsequent generation with ever-increasing speed, visual images are supplanting print as the metaphor of choice, with story and symbol as our chief means to receive and process information, to experience and construct meaning, to convey emotion and communicate. The prescient dictum of Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is the message," still holds, as Pierre Babin writes a quarter-century later: "The medium is not just a limited technical prop, but the totality of the infrastructures and conditions necessary for a medium to function."³

If mainline churches with liturgies of printed texts rooted in the Enlightenment and modern linear thought forms, who lament the loss of the post-baby-boom generations, believe that such people must be converted from the effects of digital age alienation and passivity if they are to return to the church, then the church is not properly reading its context. "Electronic culture," writes Leonard Sweet, "creates *interactive*, not passive people."⁴

Interactive people of the digital age who seek a transcendent experience of God and authentic encounter with neighbor are bypassing the mainline churches in favor of creating their own "do-it-yourself religion" characterized by non-linear thought forms situated within a social model of interconnectivity.⁵ Finding new ways to speak of God in worship, ways that preserve the historic witness of a church secured in faith, entails not simply finding new ways to *speak about* God, but rather finding imaginative ways to *experience* God through story, image, and symbol—the language of the digital age.

To this end I created "Stories of Resurrection: Traces of God in New Community," an experimental liturgical event drawn from religious dramatic forms, both contemporary and medieval, which celebrates the faith stories of newly baptized Christian adults. Striving to integrate worship, teaching, and evangelism, the project seeks to connect mainline worship

that adheres to set liturgical forms and texts with digital image, symbol, and dramatic storytelling as a form of alternate proclamation of the Gospel. Bridging theory and practice, the project tackles the serious challenge facing the twenty-first century church: how to uphold tradition and yet remain open to innovation, how to be seeker-sensitive within the renewed missional context of secular Western culture and deeply rooted in the historic witness of the church.

The Church Setting

The use of drama, image, and electronic media as conversation partners for proclamation of the Gospel is a prominent feature of the contemporary worship genre, by which I mean Protestant North American megachurch worship, not typically part of the mainline worship tradition. My first challenge then was to determine in what type of parish, and in what context within parish life, I might introduce such a venture to an assembly accustomed to a long history of mostly fixed liturgies following set texts and rubrics. I chose to work within the context of a large urban Episcopal parish with highly intentional, well-planned traditional worship, accompanied by a large music program, along with strong preaching and catechetical programs. This type of parish draws many seekers and converts roughly aged twenty to forty. This type of parish is, however, open to pushing the limits of traditional rubrics through the use of innovative ceremonial and symbol in an effort to create liturgical variety while marking sacred time; as such it might be more closely aligned with the postmodern, non-linear intuitional approach than one might at first suspect. Therefore, we can see some similarities with mostly suburban Protestant megachurches in terms of mission, and yet we know there are also discontinuities in terms of worship style, traditions, theologies, and urban setting.



fig. 1 "White": Jennifer Muller Dance Company. Photo ©Johan Elbers 2005.

I determined that working in the context of the post-baptismal phase of the catechumenate, the period following the Easter Vigil, could be advantageous for liturgical experimentation. The catechumenate is a process of preparing adult converts for baptism; it finds its inspiration in the historic catechumenate of the fourth century with the sermons and teachings of Cyril, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Theodore. The contemporary catechumenate is a process of spiritual journey involving staged rites and regular gatherings in small groups to study and reflect on Scripture. The catechumens make vivid connections with Scripture by developing and sharing stories in the form of spiritual autobiographies. The catechumenate, which can typically span the course of a year, was reclaimed following Vatican II, and has been adapted in various ways by most mainline denominations. Its final stage, known as post-baptismal catechesis, or mystagogy, begins in the Easter Octave and continues through Pentecost. The mystagogical phase is a time of continued conversion, spiritual growth, meditation on the meaning of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, and incorporation into community and discernment of ministries. My liturgy is intended to take place at a midweek Easter service following the Easter Vigil.

In seeking to explore the challenge of incorporating newly baptized adult converts into community in the days following the Easter Vigil, I believe I found both a pastorally and strategically appropriate time to introduce a new form of worship, an alternate proclamation of the Gospel within a multi-media context. Introducing this in the context of a one-off celebratory event seemed to be less confrontational, and a good pastoral solution. The post-

baptismal phase of the catechumenate has typically been problematic: neophytes often experience a marked emotional letdown following the intense preparation culminating in the Vigil, and difficulty in integrating into normal parish life.

Another way to view the setting is to employ a set of classifying labels for North American Worship developed by Lester Ruth.⁶ This is based upon James F. White's assessment of the ethos of a tradition. Ruth believes that the way in which a community plans its liturgies may be classified as "congregational," operating as an independent congregation, or "connectional," using resources common to its tradition. When churches face the issue of inculturation, Ruth believes they respond in one of these two ways.

My project is situated within the context of a church that is connectional. To contend with the issue of inculturation, that of culture and media savvy urbanites within a postmodern context, I loosely use two resources common to the tradition of my parish setting. First, the liturgical event follows the Prayer Book structure as interpreted in the parish's weekly eucharistic worship—gathering, word, table, and sending. Secondly, the parish traditionally draws from and interprets certain medieval ceremonial and liturgical enactments in its worship.

Seeking to preserve the historic witness of the faith and yet be open to innovation, I have drawn upon some existing Anglican traditions. In so completely recasting them in a contemporary context, however, and working in media forms more akin to the North American Protestant megachurch, I believe I have ultimately worked within a third category that Ruth employs, that of being officially connectional but working in an autonomous congregational model for purposes of inculturation.

Drama in Contemporary Worship

"Worship," writes Kenda Creasy Dean, "constitutes one of the oldest forms of play known to human society. Human beings have always engaged in 'sacred games' that dramatize the values of their cultic communities."⁷ Drawing on her research on the culturally contextual worship of adolescents and their need for a playful and imaginative style of worship, Dean advocates considering such qualities in worship for all ages. Worship that is relational and interactive, she writes, "invites our participation in an expanded view of reality." Quoting Wolfhart Pannenberg, she observes, "Play points to a larger reality, a 'true order' of things intuited but not fully grasped intellectually." Finally, she notes:

The act of playing has a "back and forth" quality to it; it is always relational, always involves an "other"—an imaginative object, a playmate, a conversation partner, a community. Play's reward comes from the deep satisfaction of losing ourselves in the play, the moment of self-abandonment in which the reality we glimpse but cannot grasp somehow grasps us. In this surrender, "something happens" indeed: the self is re-created, infused with intrinsic worth and meaning as we give ourselves over to an Other—an Other that has already given itself over to us (137–38).

Drama performed by adults is indeed a kind of childlike play that seeks to be transformational. When audiences are drawn into a drama, they too can experience a form of imaginative play.

Robert Webber's observation on the arts in general can be applied to an effective implementation of drama in worship: "The arts are important not only because of the Incarnation, but also because they communicate. The arts are the language of intuition, a

poetic, imaginative way of supporting and enhancing the text of worship, the Gospel."⁸

Using drama in worship can be a playful means of transformational communication. However, this notion of playfulness should not make us think that drama, in general or as used in worship, is by any means trivial. The classic definition of drama as a representation of life comes to us from Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which he writes that drama is "an imitation of an action that is serious and . . . complete in itself."⁹ It consists of a reversal, or *peripeteia*, which, according to Aristotle, causes the action "to veer around in the other direction," thus dramatically aiding us to experience transformation.

I designed my project to be in conversation with two dramatic forms. The first is found in the contemporary North American Protestant megachurch tradition, perhaps best known through the Seeker Services at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois; the second is medieval liturgical drama. From the dramatic liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England I chose the tenth-century Easter play, *Visitatio Sepulchri*, from Winchester Cathedral.

The Seeker Services. "Few topics can polarize a conversation within Christian circles the way the subject of Willow Creek Community Church can," writes Todd E. Johnson. "Regardless of how favorably one views Willow Creek, most believe it is a unique phenomenon in the Church."¹⁰ Willow Creek's mission to those outside the church surpasses most efforts in today's church. In its mission to reach its target audience, identified by Willow Creek as "unchurched Harry or Mary," drama serves as a key element.

As the paradigmatic church of the seeker movement, Willow Creek has changed the way many worship. Founded in 1975 with the express purpose of reaching those outside the church, it now attracts upwards of fifteen thousand people to its weekend Seeker Service. The church campus, which resembles a community college or corporate training center, is designed to reduce the cognitive dissonance between the religious realm and the working and shopping worlds of middle-class suburban America. Typically, no crosses or other religious symbols are on display.

I first observed a Willow Creek drama as a participant-observer at its annual Leadership Summit conference via satellite downlink at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, during the summer of 2002—this was broadcast to over twenty-five thousand church leaders around the world. The professionally produced and polished drama was acted in its forty-five-thousand-seat auditorium equipped with movie-theatre-style seats, proscenium curtained stage, and state-of-the-art technical equipment.

Other Protestant churches widely emulate the style and format of drama employed by Willow Creek, although they adapt it in some settings to reach both seeker and believer. I will limit my focus to the Willow Creek model, as it offers the greatest contrast with the historical model of sacred drama, the *Visitatio Sepulchri*.

At Willow Creek a need is first identified, and a short skit is developed to present the problem in a way that can be experienced emotionally by the assembly. G. A. Pritchard, in Willow Creek Seeker Service, describes the dramas as follows: "They [the skits] involve revealing common human problems, enabling Creekers to identify with unchurched Harry, providing self-understanding for Harry, and lowering Harry's defenses."¹¹ Each skit is typically five to eight minutes in duration. It illustrates a problem that will be addressed in the message spoken by a pastor. Pritchard quotes one Willow Creek staff member as saying: "Drama is the best way we know of to really portray the problem of whatever we're going to talk about. In other words,

every service has a theme or a main point. And drama is the way that we can connect people with the problem, not the solution" (92).

Willow Creek's use of sketch-style drama and overall programming reflects the shift from word- to image-based communication. Creekers believe that if they are to reach "unchurched Harry" they must speak his language, the language of the media. Pritchard points out that the prevailing opinion of the staff at Willow Creek is that as a result of the communication revolution "individuals are increasingly unable to follow an argument, think critically, and process information from a single source without visual and auditory stimulation" (91).

The method of inculturation then, to use Lester Ruth's categories, is that of the congregational model. There are no real referents to the historical tradition, and there are no set liturgical texts to be considered. Willow Creek uses popular culture as its referent. The short television skit, a simple, uncomplicated version of a *Saturday Night Live* sketch, is the model. Not all, however, are of a humorous nature. One drama, entitled "Great Expectations," involved a couple having trouble conceiving a child. They tried to adopt, but at the last minute the adoption fell through. The wife erupted in rage at God, and the husband tried to comfort her—the skit ended there. A skit is never fully developed into a drama per se, one with a reversal or transformational moment.

Pritchard reports the following: "When Willow Creek has attempted to use drama to teach answers to unchurched Harry, the results have been less than satisfying" (93). We see here that the drama is used to set up a pedagogic moment, servant to the pastor's message; it is not intended to function pedagogically on its own, nor is it intended in any way to function in a sacramental mode. Drama is not considered a suitable way to preach the Gospel when the goal is to raise a question and provide an answer that gives clear assurance and a "how-to" application; the drama sets up the problem, the message offers the solution.

Pritchard offers the following critique, "Creekers generally seek to avoid complexity and they believe that nuances are dispensable. Creekers often use visual stimulation as a substitute for thought and do not value verbal precision." He also points out that in Willow Creek's overall use of the arts there is "a potential lack of willingness to upset or confront Harry" and thus a high priority is placed on providing entertainment, with the result a "cheerful Christianity" (93).

Willow Creek and most other communities offering contemporary worship do not follow a lectionary or liturgical year. Thus, without the progression through the liturgical year—especially entering into the darker aspects of Lent and the cross—and without the use of deep symbols, the move into a more mature faith and response to discipleship is at risk. I believe that the dramas set within the overall programmatic goals of Willow Creek run amiss by offering a therapeutic message rather than the Gospel message in all its complexity. This has inspired me to rethink the model through the lens of medieval liturgical drama.

Visitatio Sepulcri. The tenth-century liturgical drama of Anglo-Saxon England arose in the era of Benedictine Reform, a time of church revitalization amidst cultural transition, not entirely dissimilar to our contemporary situation. Tracing the earlier roots of the reform in Anglo-Saxon England, M. Bradford Bedingfield writes:

When Augustine arrived in Canterbury in 597, in an attempt to revive a Christian church in the British Isles that had been largely smothered by Anglo-Saxon

migrations, he was given a mandate by Pope Gregory to marry the best of local traditions with the practice of Rome, and this approach remained a dynamic in subsequent reforms. This sort of philosophy surely encouraged a diverse liturgy, but the paucity of surviving manuscripts from before the tenth century stunts our appreciation of it . . . We can develop a much clearer picture, however, of the liturgical activities of the later Anglo-Saxon church as the Benedictine Reform spurred the production of a plethora of liturgical books and other documentary witnesses to what has recently been referred to as a "period of national liturgical experiment and innovation."¹²

In the tenth century, Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, drew up what is considered the earliest extant playlet of the *Visitatio Sepulchri*. Complete with stage directions for its performance at Easter Matins, the scriptural core of the story—the visitation of the women at the tomb seen through the lens of the Roman Liturgy—can be said to represent the birth of medieval drama. The *Regularis Concordia* contains the written text of the *Visitatio Sepulchri*, along with staging directions. It appears to be a combination of two versions of the *Quem quaertis* ("Whom do you seek?"), a familiar medieval trope crafted into two episodes or scenes. This is accomplished by the introduction of two newly composed antiphons, *Venite et videte locum* ("Come and see the place") and *Cito euntes* ("Going quickly, tell the disciples") which can be found in The Winchester Troper, another tenth century document containing the text with music for the *Visitatio Sepulchri* at Winchester.

Three texts from the Vulgate serve as the source of the *Quem quaertis* dialogue used by Ethelwold and his associates: Matthew 28:1–8, Mark 16:1–8, and Luke 24:1–12. These tell the story of the "Marys" being met at the tomb by an Angel. According to the *Regularis Concordia* the Angel, wearing a simple white alb, "stealthily" makes his way during the third lesson of Matins to the area of the main altar, which in the Old Minster would have been oriented to the east. We have no description of the set piece representing the sepulcher, but it was most likely some sort of veiled receptacle located on or at the high altar; probably with a hollowed-out section for the placement of relics, thus already suggesting the idea of a tomb.

The Angel, poised at the tomb during the lesson, quietly sits watch over this liturgical "Jerusalem." This was evocatively rendered at the service of None on Good Friday, when "Golgotha" was poignantly recreated as all, bishop and novice alike, crept to the altar area for the adoration of the cross prior to the *Depositio*; then the cross and/or host wrapped in linen, symbolic of Christ's lifeless body, was placed at rest, thus creating the "Holy Sepulcher." The Angel awaits the women with a palm branch in hand; this acts as a polyvalent symbol, harkening not only the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem celebrated in the Palm Sunday liturgy, but also the imagery found in the book of Revelation (7:9) where the worshipping throngs gathered around the throne in heaven arrayed with crowns and holding palm fronds; finally, the palm could also be read as a hopeful "green" sign of new birth and new life.

Meanwhile, during the singing of the third responsory (*Dum transisset sabbatum*), the three women, traditionally called the "Marys" (who were actually men vested in copes, with thuribles in hand to represent the aromatic spices for the anointing) approach the sepulcher. Perhaps they enter north of the altar, where the worshipping community (composed of at least clergy, monks, novices, and boy singers, seated in two banks of stalls along the north and south sides near the high altar) catch sight of them as they wend their way around to the nave, and

thus begin their doleful pilgrimage to the tomb. If seculars were present, the sight lines would have been quite good given the open basilica-style structure of the Old Minster. When the women draw near the sepulcher, "step by step," according to the rubrics, "as if searching for something," the Angel "sweetly" and "softly" intones the question that begins the traditional dialogue of the *Quem quaeritis*: "Whom do you seek?" The Marys answer, "Jesus of Nazareth." This is followed by the angelic pronouncement, *Non est hic*, "He is not here, he is risen!"

The women make their way back to the two banks of stalls to tell the news of the resurrection, replete with the joyful alleluias that had been "put away" for the duration of Lent. The Angel then summons the women back to "come and see" the place inside of the tomb. The women lay down their thuribles and lift up the linen, now empty of cross and host, while the Angel exhorts the women to "go quickly and tell." Once the linen has been lifted for all to see, it is placed on the altar by Mary Magdalene in a gesture resembling the preparation for the Mass: here, in medieval sacramental thought most notably, Jesus is to be found. This is true not only for a novice being newly educated in the events of the paschal mystery, but also for seasoned monks, and seculars, if present, as well. The whole of the drama is brought to its conclusion, along with the Office of Easter Matins, with the singing of the *Te Deum laudamus*, while the bells ring out again after their silence, announcing the great joy of the resurrection.

The juxtaposition of Ethelwold's newly composed material for his *Visitatio Sepulchri*, along with well-known liturgical texts and canticles such as the *Te Deum*, dramatically enacted within the context of worship, make the holy dramatic and the dramatic holy. Players dressed in the common liturgical garb of worship while at the same time suggesting specific characters from Scripture; familiar space sculpted into a "liturgical Jerusalem"; newly composed chants along with traditional readings, music, and gestures allow the entire event to create a sense of time and space condensed and yet unhinged—heaven and earth intersecting in a historical yet timeless moment—a first century Jerusalem/tenth century Winchester dichotomy revealing and yet hiding the supreme mystery of the Christian faith. As Umberto Eco writes, "The formation of symbols was artistic. To decipher them was to experience them aesthetically. It was a type of aesthetic expression in which the Medievals took great pleasure in deciphering puzzles, in spotting the daring analogy, in feeling that they were involved in adventure and discovery."¹³

The medieval use and appreciation of story, drama, and symbol in general, but specifically as employed in the Easter play, is in stark contrast with the theory and practice of drama in much of contemporary worship. The density and depth of the symbolic world employed by medieval people is profound, highly engaging, and participatory; it possesses not only a pedagogical goal, but, more pointedly, a participatory or sacramental purpose. The drama endeavors to create what postmodern seekers so desire—an encounter or an experience of the risen Christ.

Issues of Postmodern Inculturation

Lester Ruth, by combining the taxonomies of James F. White and Robert Webber, defines two categories, "personal story churches" and "cosmic story churches," representing a continuum rather than distinct categories.¹⁴ The catechumenate is intended largely to incorporate catechumens into the "cosmic story." Although it is a spiritual journey, the formalized rites culminating in initiation at the Easter Vigil focus predominately upon the cosmic story and incorporation into the mystical body of Christ. The postmodernist, in a shift away from the modernist's formalism and highly individualized spiritual experience in a corporate setting, wants an experiential encounter, but one that allows for connectedness. The postmodernist

deeply desires participation in community.

My project aimed to model this connectedness. The catechumens, having been incorporated into God's story at the Vigil through their baptism, would, as an interconnected group, not only place their stories next to God's story, but also make themselves known within the larger community. This liturgical celebration, following on the heels of the Vigil, would allow for worship that incorporates "personal story" into an otherwise "cosmic story" church.

Focusing on the personal story told in fragmentary pieces, juxtaposed with a confident Christian story, is another way to respond to postmodern resistance to the totalizing claims of master narratives. As suggested in the writings of Lieven Boeve, it allows for an approach that respects particularities and otherness, juxtaposed with the importance of the Christian narrative for the Christian, and holding open the possibility of recognizing mutuality and the fragmentary nature of all narratives.¹⁵

Cultural particularity. Following John Witvliet's concern that liturgical expression ought to reflect the particular cultural context of the local congregation, I aimed to create what he calls a "sufficiently complex understanding" of how worship is at once transcultural, contextual, countercultural, and cross-cultural.¹⁶ The juxtaposition of biblical text, personal story, and image aimed to work on a transcultural level in speaking of the catholic faith, especially through symbols of the Easter story—but symbols constructed by using images and stories from the culture juxtaposed with stories from Scripture. Secondly, the liturgy certainly aimed at incorporating some cross-cultural elements through a choice of music and story that included elements from the African American tradition (the use of Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* in the gathering video, its integral place within the story of the drama, and the singing of gospel music used by Ailey in his work), as well as a story of death and rebirth as recounted in the tale of an Argentinean rite of infant baptism. Thirdly, the authenticity of the presentation, the openness in which participants shared their stories, was somewhat countercultural for typically more emotionally guarded urbanites, but not completely at odds, given postmodern desire for community and intimacy. Finally, with concern for postmodern cultural particularity, I aimed to work primarily in a contextual manner—what Witvliet describes as, "reflecting the unique genius of the culture in which it [worship] is placed." Engaging the dramatic and visual arts in a community that defines itself to a large extent within the context of a creative and artistic milieu was of first importance in my liturgical task. I aimed to speak the language of the culture defined by art, but not without heeding the admonition of Bryan Spinks and John Fenwick to the church as it responds to Western secular values: "challenge individualism, and selfish materialism, and dare to speak the mystery of God and transcendent."¹⁷

Engaging the culture and working in a contemporary mode was an important part of the task, given that the denomination is, in general, resistant to contemporary paradigms, and its ceremonial practice seems to prefer and even idealize what Gordon Lathrop describes as "*an archaic, imagination-bearing event*."¹⁸ Lathrop cites processions, archaic vesture, and hierarchically organized candlelit space as examples, and all were present at the Easter Vigil.

Ruth Meyers emblemizes the difficulty in integrating contemporary paradigms into historical worship; speaking to a totalizing view concerning the church's practices in the contemporary catechumenate she offers a trenchant but apt critique: "[T]o the extent that the catechumenate attempts to reproduce practices from the fourth and fifth centuries, it is little more than an exercise in historical romanticism."¹⁹

Faced in my project with the age-old challenge of recontextualizing the presentation of the Christian message, I charted my course by words delivered in Bryan Spinks's Pitt Lecture at Yale Divinity School's Tercentennial Convocation in 2001:

The church in a post Christian society may not be in the same situation as it was in the era of Christendom, but neither can it do backward somersaults and land in the third century... there can be no liturgical meta-narratives and no golden ages. The whole tradition is a possible source of inspiration, but never replication. It may be that the creativity of the medieval period could be a more helpful inspiration than has been hitherto thought.²⁰

Embodiment. A harbinger of the intense postmodern turn to the body, the choreographer Martha Graham, heralded for creating an entirely new art form that speaks profoundly of the redemption or freedom of the body, firmly maintained that she had simply rediscovered what the body already knew.²¹ Today, cognitive science is coming to similar conclusions: the mind is intrinsically embodied. Scott Holland, in his work "Even the Postmodern Story Has a Body,"²² offers the following summation of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's empirical research as presented in *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*:

—Reason is not disembodied as the tradition has largely held, but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience. This is not just the innocuous and obvious claim that we need a body to reason; rather, it is the striking claim that the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment . . . —Reason is not purely literal, but largely metaphorical and imaginative. —Reason is not dispassionate, but emotionally engaged.²³

For Christians, both modern and postmodern, who find our hope in a resurrected Christ, to reflect upon our embodied nature seems good. Bruce Morrill reminds us of a theological principle:

God saves our humanity right in our very material actions and circumstances. This is a necessary consequence of the theological commitment to the embodied character of our sanctification, for there is no disembodied realm where we are being saved.²⁴

Since the beginning of modernity we have been progressively disembodied. The reclamation of the body, not only for wholeness in life but in worship as well, ought to be considered. Don Saliers writes of the importance of our remembering our bodies in worship:

In some respects, our bodily movements . . . may be the most deeply theological aspects of our communal worship. For the human body is itself a primary symbol of God's glory...it is the fundamental conception of God incarnate in a human being that gives such theological significance to bodily action.²⁵

That I endeavored in my project to reclaim the story of Mary Magdalene, the first witness, juxtaposed to the story of a new witness named Peyton (a student at Yale Divinity School), largely through images of the choreography of Martha Graham, seemed important for expressing some aspect of the indwelling of the sacred in our lives. Nicholas Wolterstorff writes: "We stand in these intimate relations because we have bodiesto denigrate dance, for

example because it so intimately involves the body is to denigrate a whole dimension of oneself."²⁶ The stark and powerful bodily images were intended to function in a manner similar to Louis-Marie Chauvet's understanding of sacrament: "The sacraments serve as a *buffer* which repels every temptation Christians might have to ignore the body, history and society...the sacraments state that the word of God wants to enter our bodies, that is our lives"²⁷

As director, I worked with two images. Peyton, as she moves through her story of conversion, transforms herself from a disembodied person to an embodied one. Each time she steps into the light a healing leads to wholeness through faith. The second image was of the juxtaposition of stational and processional liturgies in medieval drama, a directing technique I learned from Margot Fassler. In medieval drama the processions moved the crowd from one *sedes*, or playing area, to another—from one scene to another—while the stational liturgy alerted the crowd that something important was happening, and as such expressed a need to stop, speak words, or say prayer. Peyton's story functioned as the stational liturgy while the interconnecting stories of the other actors functioned for the most part as the processional liturgy.

The use of photographic images in the project, specifically images of dance, is intended to function in a pedagogical, pastoral, and theological mode—a meditation on the goodness of the human body as that which connects to bodily resurrection, but my hope is that the use of art will also function sacramentally. The images are stark and iconic, symbolic rather than purely realistic, like the thurible in the medieval drama that represented a container of myrrh. Robert K. Johnson writes: "The visual reinforcement allows for a liturgy of enactment that is transformative. The pedagogical has become the sacramental through the gracious presence of the Spirit of Christ, who fills it with his divine presence."²⁸

Reading the Images. I will now briefly and selectively describe some of the larger movements of the piece through my discussion of a few of the images that embody key themes.

Artists such as Frantisek Kupka (1871–1957) believed that using pure pigment created a direct experience of light, and his premise raised two questions for me. I wondered whether we do indeed have direct encounters with God, and if so, how these are manifest. More specifically, in what way do the visual cues around us, namely the interplay between light and darkness, bespeak or become a vestige of God.



fig. 2 Cross Fade by Alwin Nikolais, 1974. Photo courtesy the Nikolais–Louis Foundation for Dance.

"Dance," observes the photographer Barbara Morgan, "is experienced continuously in time and space, but it is remembered in moments of combustion . . . that haunt and stir the memory."²⁹ In the words of my subtitle, "Traces of God" speaks of our transient knowledge of the divine, which even when experienced as disclosure is somehow set against the backdrop of mystery and incomprehension. This is articulated later in a story of watching a Balanchine ballet when a woman is lifted up and vanishes into both darkness behind the curtain and into light—the space she once occupied is now filled with color and light. As Don Saliers writes:

The visible reveals the invisible world—that which the natural eye cannot see. In those instances we might think of the primary eschatological sense being sight. Hence the prominent metaphor of "seeing God" and "beholding the mystery." The visual dimension of liturgy is a means of communication and a sign itself of the incarnation.³⁰



fig. 3 "A Letter to Queen Victoria" in *Dance: Rituals of Experience* by Jamake Highwater.
Photo ©Lois Greenfield

With regard to the idea of God in both light and darkness, Delores Williams and others have called for a rethinking of images of light and dark, black and white.³¹ I used color images bracketing black and white images to portray something of the idea that color and darkness both reveal God. Culturally we are conditioned to think of God in the category of light, but when Peyton first begins to yearn for God, to feel the tug of the divine in her heart—and until she articulates a coming to faith—I use black and white photography. Richard Davey writes about the use of black in art: "It can declare the absence of God...but black is created through the mixing of all colors, and so the apparent absence could in reality be the absolute presence of the Divine light."³² I draw on the apophatic mystical tradition of God dwelling in the darkness, along with the idea that perhaps it is the time when we are coming to faith, when we are simply not sure of God's presence, that God is most present. As Peyton says in her story of Ailey's "Fix me Jesus," from *Revelations*, "Just when the woman looks as if she will fall, the man catches her—God is always there, always present."

Another aspect of Kupka's artistic philosophy also influenced my theological project. Kupka makes use of many circular forms in his work, which he interconnects like a Venn diagram. Such imagery speaks to me of the coinherence of the Godhead, a dance-like social model of the Trinity. Not only does it suggest a sense that the Triune God is on the move in the story/stories of resurrection, but it models an understanding of community as well, an ecclesiology of circular and overlapping intersubjectivity.

Feminist theologians have taught us much about circular community. Leaders certainly must

exist in an ecclesial structure, as in any social structure, but leadership can be fluid and intercommunicative. Those that are officially called out by community to lead can do so by empowering others; their leadership can function as a focal point rather than a hierarchical point. Mary Collins writes, "In feminist liturgies dualisms regularly are transformed to circles and spirals and spheres and squares, symbols that embrace multiple energies in tension."³³

Using James Joyce's evocative phrase, "In the beginning . . . was the sounddance," announces a movement away from dichotomies such as mind/body that have led to our progressive disembodiment, or the audible/visible split found in the theology of God's presence vs. God's word in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g. Isaiah vs. Deuteronomy) that has, to some extent, been used to fuel the polemical Catholic/Protestant divide. Another way to think about this is, as the theater artist Robert Wilson reminds us, that the visual book need not be subservient to what you hear (Fig. 3 [Imago]).³⁴ The "Word" that in the beginning was with God and was God (John's prologue) is not the Greek abstract notion of logos. The Incarnation tells us otherwise, for the Word becomes embodied—the mode necessary for our salvation from disembodiment. Thus I began our story by assigning the text from the Fourth Gospel's account of Mary Magdalene, "Now Mary was at the tomb, weeping..." as a "sounddance" to be spoken by all; each member takes some part of the words, and thus it takes the entire body to make the "sounddance" that reintroduces Mary/Peyton into the Easter story.

The process of seeking out images for this liturgy was something akin to using homemade bread rather than thin wafer crackers for the Eucharist. The images chosen were meant to resonate, to be real and full, not thin and irrelevant symbols—hand chosen, hand crafted, as a gift to the storyteller and to the assembly. Individual members of the assembly may not be able to articulate explicitly how the texture and detail of symbols affect them, but on some level they intuit and experienced as it a deep and authentic source of mediation.

Susan Ross, drawing on Paul Ricoeur's famous dictum, "The symbol gives rise to thought," suggests that symbols provoke reflection, kindle the imagination.³⁵ This is indeed what happened in my study of the medieval Easter play, *Visitatio Sepulchri*. The use of symbol was thrilling.

The use of the linen to bury the cross on Good Friday, and its subsequent showing as a sign of the resurrection, caught my sense of adventure and discovery. When Mary Magdalene held up the cloth at the climactic moment of the play, and then placed it on the altar as the place where the assembly would now find Christ in the Mass, my imagination was kindled. A white cloth marking the playing area in figure 1, *Primitive Mysteries*, spoke to me of Mary Magdalene, the linen in the *Visitatio Sepulchri*, women and the priesthood, and sacramental theology in general.

Conclusion

My liturgy was intended to function as the "liturgy of the word" portion of a service that would include gathering, collects, readings from the texts included in the drama, and, following the drama, the liturgy of the table and sending. I look forward to working this out in a real context so that I may see what changes need to be implemented to balance the power of the technological enhancements.

The technology of media is one the most powerful tools for post-modern storytelling. Speaking

of electronically produced images, James White cautions:

We must be careful that they do not submerge the rest of the service.... The power of the electronically produced visual images is so strong that we must know what we are doing. These media can dominate everything else so easily that the rest of the service seems overwhelmed. If we try to illustrate the sermon, we may find we have to stop preaching.³⁶

This clearly became a consideration in my project. Once the images were juxtaposed with the stories, it became clear that the actors would have to sit *schola* style and refer to the screen—the images were simply too powerful.

Robert Webber believes that churches that are renewing themselves are paying more attention to the arts in recognition that worship itself is an art, and that they are also integrating the arts in worship. "The churches most sensitive to the arts are churches that give the arts a servant role in worship." He continues, "While it is possible to worship without the arts, modern worshippers are acutely aware of how important the arts are to worship."³⁷ It is to this end that I created this project in conversation with both historical and contemporary voices.

In this project I have looked at the use of drama in the Seeker Service at Willow Creek and the medieval use of drama at tenth-century Winchester. In the process I have criticized the Willow Creek model as off-loading tradition and historical references, while I also offered a critique of my own tradition, which is resistant to contemporary paradigms and at times engages in exercises of historical romanticism. To the seeker movement at Willow Creek, T. S. Eliot's concluding section of *Little Gidding* seems fitting:

A people without history
is not redeemed from time, for history is
a pattern
Of timeless moments . . .

And to my tradition, with its tendency to historical romanticism and to favoring golden ages, an aphorism of Cyprian of Carthage in his *Epistle to Pompey* is instructive: "Custom without truth is just old error."

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *Primitive Mysteries* by Martha Graham, 1935 (photographer: Barbara Morgan) in Barbara Morgan, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Morgan & Morgan, 1980), 45.
2. *Cross Fade* by Alwin Nikolais, 1974 (photographer: Nikolais Dance Theatre, uncredited) in Highwater, *Dance*, 184.
3. *Imago* by Alwin Nikolais, 1963 (photographer: uncredited) in Francesca Pedroni, *Alwin Nikolais* (Palermo: L'EPOS, 2000), vi.

ENDNOTES

1. See Timothy J. Wright, *A Community of Joy: How to Create Contemporary Worship*, ed. by Herbert Miller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 60.
2. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 114.
3. *The New Era in Religious Communication* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 29. See also Constance M. Cherry's essay "Merging Tradition and Innovation in the Life of the Church," in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen: Worship and Ministry in the 21st Century*, ed. Todd Johnson, 19–32. (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002).
4. In the Preface to Len Wilson's, *The Wired Church: Making Media Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 11.
5. For recent articles on "emerging" or "post-modern" churches see Elisabeth Bernstein, "Do-It-Yourself Religion," *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 June 2004, W:1; and John Leland, "Hip New Churches Pray to a Different Drummer," *The New York Times*, 18 February 2004, 1.
6. Lester Ruth, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Attempts at Classifying North American Protestant Worship," in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen*, ed. Todd E. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 52.
7. "Moshing for Jesus: Adolescence as a Cultural Context for Worship," in *Making Room at the Table: An Invitation to Multicultural Worship*, ed. Brian K. Blount and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 137.
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9. Aristotle, "Poetics," in *The Pocket Aristotle*, ed. Justin D. Kaplan (New York: Washington Square, 1958), 348.
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11. *Willow Creek Seeker Service: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 92.
12. *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2002), 1, citing Christopher Jones, "The Book of Liturgy," *Speculum* 73 (1998), 685.
13. *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986), 55.
14. "A Rose" (note 6), 47.
15. See Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Louvain: Peeters, 2003)
16. "Beyond Style," in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 78–79.
17. Bryan Spinks and John Fenwick, *Worship in Transition: The Liturgical Movement in the*

Twentieth Century (New York: Continuum, 1995), 166.

18. *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 28 (Lathrop's italics).

19. "Journeys of Faith: Current Practices of Christian Initiation," in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen*, ed. Todd E. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 97.

20. "Berkeley, Liturgical Scholars and the Liturgical Movement." This lecture was published in Berkeley at Yale 20 (2002): 8–13. The quotation is taken from pp. 12–13.

21. See Marian Horosko, *Martha Graham: The Evolution of Her Dance Theory and Training*, rev. ed. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002), IX.

22. *In The Presence of Transcendence*, ed. by Lieven Boeve and John C. Ries (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 239–50.

23. Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 4, quoted by Holland, "Even the Postmodern," 243.

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25. *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 163-64.

26. *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 71-72.

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30. *Worship as Theology*, 193.

31. See Linda Moody, "Women's Theologies in Dialogue," in *Women Encounter God* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 127.

32. "Sacred Light: The Art of Richard Kenton Webb", *Image 22* (Winter/Spring, 1999), 98–109.

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34. See *The A.R.T. News*, 6 (March 1986): 3.

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37. Webber, *Blended Worship* (note 8), 115.

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Without the resurrection, the belief in God's saving grace through Jesus is destroyed. When Jesus rose from the dead, he confirmed his identity as the Son of God and his work of atonement, redemption, reconciliation, and salvation. The resurrection was a real, literal, physical raising of Jesus's body from the dead. Jesus was arrested, tried and found guilty of claiming to be a king. Both the Old and the New Testament speak of the truth of the Jesus being raised from death - Jesus testified of his resurrection before he died on the cross and his disciples witnessed his body after the resurrection. Below are the Bible verses and Scriptures that both prophesize of the resurrection and testify of its reality after Christ's death. Read 125 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Why did Christianity begin, and why did it take... There is nothing new in Jesus's story. This simply isn't so. There isn't a single story of a god rising PHYSICALLY from the dead. People in the ancient world knew what we know now: dead people do not rise again. Having done this Wright then explores the use of resurrection as word and theme throughout the New Testament, beginning with Paul's letters except for portions of 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 4, then returning to those sections, and then the rest of the NT letters. He then turns to early Christian literature until the point at which "resurrection" begins taking on a more purely "spiritual" meaning.